

**Remarks of Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.**  
**Remarks at the Forum on Efforts to Combat**  
**Human Trafficking**  
**Waterfront Hotel, Cebu City**  
**June 24, 2010**

Ladies and Gentlemen, a pleasant day to all of you - Maayong ugto sa inyo nga tanan. This is my first trip to Cebu, and I can't think of a better group with whom to share my first lunch than people who are truly on the front lines in the fight against human trafficking. My thanks go to our good friends at the International Justice Mission for bringing us all together today.

The commitment to protecting and promoting respect for human rights is a shared legacy of our two nations. Addressing the persistent injustice of trafficking in persons, a modern-day form of slavery that crosses cultures and continents, is one of my priorities in the Philippines, and an issue that the U.S. Government works to combat worldwide. I wish I could personally thank each of you for your efforts to curb this heinous human right violation. Instead, let me take a moment to recognize your work.

Here today we have prosecutors, judges, law enforcement officials, or and those who work with local governments and government agencies to make or enforce antitrafficking laws and regulations. These are the people working to ensure that human traffickers, those who exploit the vulnerable out of greed, are brought to justice. The Philippine anti-trafficking law is a potent weapon, but its effective enforcement is the key to success. Please join me in applauding their efforts.

Then we have those who work to protect victims –the social workers, NGOs and members of the church community who provide services to trafficking survivors, men, women, and children who dream of a better but instead find themselves exploited by abusive employers, held in sexual slavery, or trapped through debt to work against their will in conditions of modern-day bondage. Successful prosecutions of these crimes can only happen when survivors are safe, secure, and able to rebuild their lives. Your work is so important, and I applaud your efforts.

The work everyone in this room does also serves to prevent trafficking, to prevent a life from becoming permanently, indelibly marked by abuse and exploitation. Every trafficker you put in jail, anti-trafficking ordinance you pass, victim hotline you create, community awareness-raising you do, every establishment that traps workers through debt bondage or coercion you close –makes a difference in people's lives. The impact of human trafficking goes well beyond individual victims; it undermines the foundations of our societies, of our democracies. Trafficking affects public health, erodes government authority, undermines the rule of law, deprives countries of human capital, and fuels organized crime. For all of your efforts to curb modern-day slavery, I salute you.

Now, please ask yourself one simple question – "**WHAT MORE CAN I DO?**"

The U.S. Department of State recently released its annual Trafficking in Persons Report, and for the second straight year the report indicates that the Philippine government is making efforts to eliminate trafficking, but that much more needs to be done. The report highlights a need for increased convictions of both labor and sex trafficking crimes, increased efforts to curb corruption that aids and abets trafficking, and more resources for antitrafficking and victim protection programs. Without significant increases in its antitrafficking efforts, the Philippines could face

certain sanctions next year, to include the loss of all non-humanitarian, nontrade-related foreign assistance. Over \$250 million in assistance to the Philippine people – some 11.4 billion pesos – is at risk.

So I'm here today to issue you a challenge. Cebu has become a destination and transit point for people trafficked domestically, and its international airport ground zero for victims falling into the hands of traffickers abroad. Fighting human trafficking is not a static exercise – the global community has to do more every year, and change our tactics as traffickers change theirs. A trafficking law passed last year must be implemented and improved this year. The lessons learned from last year's prosecutions should inform and improve this year's law enforcement response. It is not enough to prosecute traffickers if we do not also provide increasing assistance to the survivors and work to ensure that no one else is victimized. The Embassy is proud to work with our partners in the Philippine Government and NGO community to support continued improvements anti-trafficking efforts here. The U.S. Government has provided almost 300 million pesos to anti-trafficking initiatives in the Philippines since 2005, including over 76 million pesos just last year. We want this support to continue.

Mother Theresa once said that "To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it." Today I challenge you to add more oil, to redouble your efforts to combat trafficking in persons, to ensure vulnerable members of society are not preyed upon, and to bring predators to justice. If it takes a village to raise a child; it takes a whole community to fight modern-day slavery. Together, we can take the "War on Trafficking" to the next level.

Daghan salamat - Thank you very much.